

■ NATIONAL CURRICULUM GUIDELINES
ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
AND CARE IN FINLAND



S T A K E S

*NATIONAL CURRICULUM GUIDELINES ON EARLY
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN FINLAND*

To the Reader

This is the English translation of the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Finland. The original Finnish document was published in September 2003.

ECEC in Finland has two main goals. One is to fulfil the day care needs of children under school age and the other is to provide early childhood education. The Curriculum Guidelines aim to promote the provision of ECEC on equal terms throughout the country, to guide the development of the content of activities, and to contribute to developing the quality of activities by introducing uniform principles for organising such activities.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is socially and culturally dependent. The concepts related to ECEC are also linked with language and its meanings. There may be major differences between the concepts used in different countries to refer to the ECEC system, services and contents. Not even the term 'early childhood education' can be defined in a uniform way. On the other hand, the same concept may have different contents depending on the context in each country.

In order to open the context and basic ideas of the National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC in Finland, a few core concepts will be defined briefly.

Early childhood education and care - ECEC

The common English term for young children's goal-oriented education is 'early childhood education'. The Finnish equivalent for the term 'education' is *kasvatus*. It has traditionally been used in a narrower sense than the English term, excluding the pedagogic perspective. This is why the English translation uses the term ECEC, which comprises the perspectives of care, education and teaching.

The term ECEC has been used in the OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy. The term also well describes the comprehensive character of the Finnish

system. It covers both the day care arrangements offered to families and the perspective of goal-oriented early childhood education opened up for children. In addition, it describes the way in which Finnish early childhood pedagogy combines care, education and teaching into a whole that is realised in daily activities. Early childhood pedagogy varies with the age of the children, the elements of care, education and teaching having different emphases in different situations.

The National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC in Finland

The Finnish document uses the term Core Plan with regard to ECEC. The Finnish equivalent for 'curriculum' is not used so as to emphasise the holistic nature of ECEC, in that it comprises care, education and teaching. The use of the term also aims to underline that the document is linked to the paradigmatic choice made within the Finnish system on the basis of broad based negotiations.

The English version, however, uses the concept 'curriculum' for the sake of clarity. Internationally, documents aimed at guiding the contents of ECEC, that is, pedagogy, are referred to as curricula.

The ECEC environment

An ECEC environment is a whole formed by physical, psychological and social elements. It includes built facilities, immediate neighbourhood, and psychological and social settings functionally linked to different situations, as well as various materials and equipment.

A similar, more familiar term is 'learning environment'. The use of the term ECEC environment underlines certain specific environmental features. The term aims to describe ECEC as being more generally linked not only to learning situations but also to care situations, play, and nature and the environment at large. It also aims to highlight the importance of various interactive relationships.

ECEC partnership

In Finnish ECEC, co-operation between the staff and parents has a solid background. The National Curriculum Guidelines seek to emphasise a new, more profound approach – referred to as ECEC partnership – which involves participation that goes further than co-operation. Educators have a key role in sharing the day-to-day education and care of the young child with the parents. It follows that the nature of the relationship between parents and educators is an essential part of the child's well-being. The journey from cooperation to ECEC partnership requires mutual, continuous and committed interaction in all matters concerning the child. The experience of being heard and mutual respect are essential for attaining shared understanding.

Educator

The term 'educator' refers to ECEC staff responsible for care, education and teaching in all different service types. In Finland, day care centres have multiprofessional staff and therefore there is variation in the level of education among the staff. At least one third of the staff must have a tertiary degree (Bachelor or Master of Arts in Education or Bachelor of Social Sciences), and the remaining staff must have an upper secondary education. In family day care, the educator mostly works alone, or in the case of group family day care, together with another educator. There is variation between municipalities and units in the level of education among educators. As of 1995, Kindergarten teachers have studied up to the university level (a Bachelor of Arts degree). More information: <http://www.stakes.fi/varttua>

Helsinki, 26 August 2004

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Preface

The National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care provide guidance for implementing the content of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Finland. As this is the first time this type of document has been prepared, feedback on its content and usability will be gathered as widely as possible. The document will be reviewed based on the feedback in summer 2004.

The task of drafting National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC was assigned STAKES in the Government Resolution Concerning the National Policy Definition on Early Childhood Education and Care¹. At STAKES, a steering group appointed by the Director General was responsible for the preparation and content of the National Curriculum Guidelines. The steering group was assisted by a working committee, the ECEC expert team at STAKES, and other expert groups established as required for dealing with the different content areas.

The steering group convened 12 times between November 2002 and September 2003. Its members were as follows: Matti Heikkilä, Deputy Director General, STAKES, Chair; Anna-Leena Välimäki, Development Manager, STAKES, Deputy Chair; Aino-Inkeri Hansson, Deputy Director General / Kirsi Alila, Senior Officer, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health; Kirsi Lindroos, Director / Tiina Kavilo, Senior Officer, as of 27 March 2003, Ministry of Education; Hely Parkkinen, Project Manager, National Board of Education, Anna-Maija Haliseva-Lahtinen, Senior Advisor, Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities; Juhani Hytönen, Professor, Helsinki University; Kirsti Karila, Professor (pro tem), Tampere University; Pirjo Forss-Pennanen, Lecturer, Polytechnics Network; Marjatta Kekkonen / Lauri Kuosmanen as of 20 August 2003, Secretary for Professional Affairs, Union of Health and Social Care Professionals, Tehy; Raili Leiqvist, Bargaining Officer, Trade Union for the Municipal Sector, KTV; Soile Oleander, Chair, Trade Union of Education/Association of Kindergarten Teachers; Airi Salmi, Secretary for Professional Affairs, Union of Professional Social Workers, Talentia; Heljä Petäjä, Secretary for Early Education and Care, Office of the

¹ Publications of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2002:9.

Church Council. Sirkka-Liisa Ihalainen worked as a secretary for the working group at STAKES.

The working committee prepared the material for the steering group. It convened 18 times. Its members were as follows: Anna-Leena Välimäki, Development Manager, STAKES, Chair; Hely Parkkinen, Project Manager, National Board of Education; Anna-Maija Haliseva-Lahtinen, Senior Advisor, Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities; Kirsi Alila, Senior Officer, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and Sirkka-Liisa Ihalainen, Project Secretary, STAKES.

A number of ECEC experts were invited to contribute to the work of the steering group and the working committee, and they were also asked to comment draft guidelines at different stages. The experts presented informed views, criticism and questions, and it represented a major challenge to be able to take account of them in the short time frame available.

The preparation of the National Curriculum Guidelines could be followed at the VARTTUA web site (<http://www.STAKES.fi/varttua/ajankohtaista/vasu.htm>) maintained by STAKES. The web site also makes available expert articles and other information supplementing the Curriculum Guidelines. It has provided an opportunity to express opinions and comment the draft guidelines. All comments have been available to both the steering group and the working committee. The web pages set up for the Curriculum Guidelines are still accessible at the VARTTUA site.

In our changing world, the provision of good ECEC calls for the engagement and commitment of research and training units, interest groups, municipal representatives, educators and parents. The aim is to implement, assess and continuously develop both the National Curriculum Guidelines and the local curricula drawn up on the basis of them.

We thank all those who have contributed to the drafting of the National Curriculum Guidelines personally, through their representatives and background groups or via the VARTTUA website.

Helsinki, 30 September 2003

Matti Heikkilä

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1 NATIONAL CURRICULUM GUIDELINES ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

1.1 The aim of the National Curriculum Guidelines

The National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care provide a national tool for guiding early childhood education and care (ECEC). It is based on the Resolution Concerning the National Policy Definition on Early Childhood Education and Care approved by the Finnish Government on 28 February 2002. The policy definition contains the central principles and development priorities for publicly operated and supervised ECEC.

The Curriculum Guidelines aim to promote the provision of ECEC on equal terms throughout the country, to guide the development of the content of activities, and to contribute to developing the quality of activities by introducing uniform principles for organising such activities.

The Curriculum Guidelines also aim to increase the professional awareness of ECEC staff, parental engagement in ECEC services, and multi-professional co-operation between different services supporting children and their families before the start of compulsory education. With the core curricula for pre-school and basic education, the Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC form a national framework for promoting children's well-being, development and learning.

Municipalities can largely organise their ECEC services so as to serve the needs of families in an optimal way. As municipalities differ markedly from each other, it is important that each one of them draw up its own specified strategic guidelines to be taken into account in drafting local ECEC curricula.

The Curriculum Guidelines concern all forms of publicly operated and supervised ECEC. Municipalities are to use them in assessing the extent to which their ECEC services meet the standard and specify the content and modes of action for different ECEC activities in their own curricula.

Education is linked to culture and constant change in society, which should be taken into account in the continuous assessment of the implementation of ECEC, as well as in the process of goal setting and attainment. To better understand what the Curriculum Guidelines are about, it is important to see them as a framework which is to be discussed and further specified so as to formulate jointly agreed practices and principles for application in municipalities and units.

1.2 Policy documents governing early childhood education and care

There are both national and local policy documents governing early childhood education and care (ECEC).

National regulations and policy documents:

- **Legislation on child daycare and pre-school education** regulates implementation of early childhood education and care, of which pre-school education forms a part.
- **National Policy Definition on Early Childhood Education and Care** contains the central principles and development priorities for publicly operated and supervised ECEC.
- **National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care** provide national guidelines for the content and quality of ECEC and for drawing up local ECEC curricula.
- **Core Curriculum for Pre-School Education in Finland** provides national guidelines for the content and quality of pre-school education and for drawing up local pre-school curricula.

Local policy documents:

- **Local policy definitions and strategies for ECEC** may form part of a municipality's child policy programme, or they are included in other policy documents concerning children and families. They define the central principles and development priorities applied in organising ECEC in the municipality, and describe its ECEC service system.
- **A local ECEC curriculum** is a policy document drafted by a municipality or several municipalities on the basis of the National Curriculum Guidelines. The curriculum takes account of the municipality's own policy definitions, strategies and goals and defines goals for the content of different service forms.
- **A local pre-school education curriculum** and the ECEC curriculum form an integrated whole, and there is a clear continuity between them.

- **A unit-specific ECEC curriculum** is more detailed than the local ECEC curriculum, describing a district's or a unit's special features and priorities. The unit-specific curriculum also includes specified goals for different service forms.
- **An individual ECEC plan and an individual pre-school education plan** are drawn up jointly between professionals and the child's parents to provide a basis for the implementation of the child's care, early education, and pre-school education.

2 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

2.1 What early childhood education and care is

Early childhood education and care is educational interaction taking place in young children's different living environments, aimed at promoting their balanced growth, development and learning. In order for the educational efforts of families and educators to form a meaningful whole from the child's point of view, close co-operation, i.e., an ECEC partnership, is needed between parents and educators.

Publicly operated, supervised and supported ECEC comprises care, education and teaching. ECEC is systematic and goal-oriented interaction and collaboration, where the child's spontaneous play is of key importance. It is built on a holistic view on children's growth, development and learning, drawing on a wide range of pedagogic knowledge, particularly ECEC knowledge, cross-disciplinary information and research, and expertise on pedagogic methodology.

A central resource for ECEC is competent staff. Maintaining a high quality of ECEC requires that both educational communities and individual educators have a strong professional awareness.

ECEC services are provided in accordance with the national policy definition, the most important activities including daycare centres, family daycare and various community-based activities. The services are provided by municipalities, organisations, private sector service providers, and parishes. Pre-school education is systematic teaching and education intended for children who will start their compulsory education the following year. Early childhood education and care, of which pre-school education forms a part, and basic education form an integrated whole that ensures consistency and continuity in the child's development². ECEC also covers children subject to compulsory education if they use ECEC services.³

² Core curricula for pre-school and basic education are defined by the National Board of Education.

³ As for children subject to compulsory education, activity planning takes account of the guidelines on club activities and the plans on morning and afternoon activities organised for school children, included in the basic education curriculum.

2.2 Values in ECEC

The values underlying ECEC in Finland are based on international conventions on the rights of the child, national legislation, and other guidelines.

A central value in the Convention on the Rights of the Child⁴ is the child's human dignity. Relating to this basic value, the Convention comprises the following four overall principles:

- ❑ Non-discrimination and equal treatment
- ❑ The child's best interest
- ❑ The child's right to life and full development
- ❑ Giving due weight to the views of the child

Drawing on Finnish basic rights regulations, other legal regulation, and policy documents, core ECEC principles can be defined. These principles embody children's right to

- ❑ Warm personal relationships
- ❑ Secured growth, development and learning
- ❑ Secure, healthy environments that allow play and a wide range of activities
- ❑ Receive understanding and have their say in accordance with their age and maturity
- ❑ Receive the special support they need
- ❑ Their own culture, language, religion and beliefs

⁴ In Finland, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which safeguards children's growth and development, came into force as a legislative act in 1991.

2.3 Educational goals

In ECEC, it is important to underline the intrinsic value of childhood, to foster childhood, and to help the child develop as a human being. ECEC activities are guided by broad educational goals that go beyond any specific educational and curricular targets. The task of educators is to ensure that the following three educational goals for development as a human being, significant for the whole life, will be taken into account in the activities in a balanced and sufficiently profound manner:

- Promotion of personal well-being
- Reinforcement of considerate behaviour and action towards others
- Gradual build-up of autonomy

In promoting personal well-being, the focus is on respect for each child's individuality. This allows children to act and develop as their own unique personalities.

Reinforcement of considerate behaviour and action towards others as an educational goal means that children learn to think of other people and care about them. They think positively of themselves, other people, and other cultures and environments. ECEC contributes to providing conditions favourable for the creation of a good society and a common world.

Gradual build-up of autonomy aims to help children grow up into adults who are able to take care of themselves and their close people and to make decisions and choices concerning their own life.

3 IMPLEMENTATION OF ECEC

3.1 The child's well-being as a target

The principal target of ECEC is to promote the child's overall well-being so as to ensure the best possible conditions for growth, learning and development. In this way, the child is able to enjoy the company of other children and educators, experiencing joy and freedom of action in an unhurried, safe atmosphere. The child is interested in his environment, and can direct his energy to play, learning and everyday activities with an appropriate level of challenge.

To promote their well-being, children's health and functional capacity are fostered and their basic needs are addressed. Hence, children feel that they are appreciated and accepted as they are, and that they are heard and seen. They are helped to develop a healthy self-esteem. They want to try new things, and learn social skills. Furthermore, each child is encountered in accordance with his individual needs, personality and family culture, and has a feeling of being treated fairly regardless of gender or social, cultural and ethnic background.

Children's well-being in ECEC activities is promoted through stable and warm personal relationships. Their relationships to parents, educators and other children are fostered, and they have a feeling of belonging in a peer group.

3.2 Care, education and teaching – an integrated whole

ECEC is a whole comprising the intertwining dimensions of care, education and teaching. These dimensions receive a different emphasis according to the age of the child and the situation. The younger the child is, the greater the extent to which interactions between the child and educators take place in care situations. These situations also involve education, teaching and guidance, being important for both the child's general well-being and learning.

Good care provides a basis for all ECEC activities. It means that children's basic needs are satisfied so that they can direct their attention to other children, the environment, and activity. The younger the child is, the more he needs to be cared for by adults.

A good combination of care, education and teaching can promote the child's positive self-image, expressive and interactive skills, and the development of thinking. The child's day consists of a variety of everyday situations, which form a basis for a well-defined but flexible daily rhythm. The care and other interactive situations and small tasks contained in the child's days are important for development and learning. Educators thus embed the dimension of teaching in the different phases of the child's day.

3.3 The role of educators in ECEC

ECEC staff composes a multi-professional educator community, which follows the values and modes of action defined and jointly agreed in national policy documents. On negotiating about the values and modes of action, the educator community is building a common ECEC culture. It is important in education work that staff are aware of their educator role and the underlying values and ethical principles. Analysing and assessing their own work helps them act consciously in accordance with ethically and professionally sound principles.

Professional and vocational knowledge and experience provide a solid foundation for competence. The educator community documents, evaluates and makes efforts to continuously develop their work. Educators maintain and develop their professional skills and are aware of the changing needs of ECEC and the new challenges created by technological advancement.

Educators need to be committed, sensitive and able to react to the child's feelings and needs. In the community of adults and children, they enable a good atmosphere, where children have a feeling of togetherness and inclusion. Educators foster the continuity of the child's friendships, and care and education relationships.

For education and teaching efforts to be conscious and goal-oriented, educators and the educator community need to make choices. The task of educators is to plan activities and to build up an environment which both takes account of children's most typical ways of action and different content orientations⁵. The view that care, education and teaching form an integrated whole acts as a guiding principle for educators, who are also aware of the child's potential for growth and learning. Educators encourage children to act independently so the children feel good about being able to do things while also receiving support when they need it. Educators also transmit earlier generations' experiences and cultural heritage and various aspects of scientific knowledge to children through the environment and various joint activities.

Educators respect children's, parents' and one another's experiences and views, and base their work on the principles of ECEC partnership.

⁵ See chapter 3.8.

3.4 The ECEC environment

An ECEC environment is a whole formed by physical, psychological and social elements. It includes built facilities, immediate neighbourhood, and psychological and social settings functionally linked to different situations, as well as various materials and equipment. When the environment is rich and flexible, and conducive to learning, it attracts interest and curiosity in children and encourages them to experiment, act and express themselves. In addition, the environment introduces a range of knowledge-, skills- and experience-based elements into actions involving both children and educators.

In planning the ECEC environment, both functional and aesthetic aspects should be taken into account. A well-built environment has good ambience, encouraging children to play, explore, move, act and express themselves in many different ways. Children can participate in planning the spaces and equipment as part of the implementation of various content areas and themes.

The atmosphere of the ECEC environment should be positive. The environment should also be safe and take account of factors related to children's health, and their well-being in general.

Planning of spaces can be used as a means to promote interactions in peer groups of different kinds and sizes and between children and educators. A well-designed ECEC environment promotes activities in small groups where everyone has an opportunity to take part in discussions and interactions.

3.5 Joy of learning

Children are naturally curious, wanting to learn new things, to redo and repeat. They learn in a holistic way. They practise and learn various skills, and when encountering new things, they make use of all their senses in the process of learning. Interacting with the environment and people, children combine things and situations with their own experiences, feelings and conceptual structures. They learn best when active and interested. When they act in a meaningful and relevant way, they can experience the joy of learning and feelings of success.

Warm personal relationships provide a basis for learning. The educator's commitment to the education and learning situation manifests itself as sensitivity to children's feelings and emotional well-being. The educator listens to children, gives them opportunities to make initiatives, decide on their activities, explore, draw conclusions, and express their thoughts. ECEC aims to develop a positive disposition to learning.

3.6 The role of language in ECEC

From the very beginning, children are interested in their environment, building a picture of the world around them and their position within it. Language has a vital role in this process. It supports the development of the child's cognitive processes and enables the communication of meanings. As the child grows up, the function of language in supporting cognitive processes grows in importance in terms of problem solving, logical thinking and imagination. Abilities related to the command of language are the key to the child's ability to learn.

In early childhood, play and fairy tales are of core importance for the development of the child's language skills and world view. Language learning is always a creative and personal process, where imitation plays a major role. In their adult and peer relationships, children learn cultural and social customs and communication models.

Initially, young children express themselves holistically by means of facial expressions, gestures and movements. At an early age, children need an educator who is regularly nearby and knows their individual way of communicating. The educator reacts empathetically when the child initiates contact, thus encouraging the child to interact. At the same time, the child's positive self-image and self-acceptance are reinforced. Gradually the child learns to classify things by means of concepts and to understand their interrelationships. The child also learns to form questions.

Through daily routines young children learn situation-specific language. While growing up, children make links between language and action when playing, which gives a greater emphasis to their own experiences, especially play, in the learning of language. Children use language to give shape to the purpose of their play, to describe how it proceeds, and to regulate their relationships.

Children are naturally disposed to playing with words. Rhymes and funny non-sense words draw the child's attention to the form of language in place of its meaning, and provides practice in the area of linguistic awareness. Children also enjoy stories. Both storytelling by children themselves and creative activities inspired by fairy tales and stories told by educators increase children's confidence in their own capabilities and help them continuously express themselves. Different types of literature belong to the world of even the youngest children. Literature offers children a wide range of insights into the world around them and the richness of language, and provides practice in listening skills.

An educator guides children's observations, teaches them how to act in different situations, and describes and explains events. Children are offered models for learning language and concepts, and they are spoken to in such a way that they understand. For the child's developmental environment to support the development of language skills, it should be stimulating and activating. The environment should allow the child to observe both spoken and written language.

3.7 The child's way of acting

Playing, movement, exploration and self-expression through different forms of art are ways of acting and thinking peculiar to children. Such activities enhance their well-being and perception of themselves and increase their opportunities for participation. An activity that children find meaningful also gives expression to their thoughts and feelings. As educators interact and discuss with children and observe their activities, they also get insights into their world and thinking.

Ways of acting that are peculiar to children are taken into account in planning and implementing activities, and used as a guiding principle in the educator community's interactions with children. They embody the significance of language, content orientations and children's learning process. ECEC is developed holistically through observing children's and the educator community's activities and the ECEC environment.

Playing

The child's meaningful experiences

Children play for the sake of playing, and at best, play can give them deep satisfaction. Although children do not play in order to learn, they learn through play. Play is rather an attitude than an activity of a certain kind, and the same activity may signify play for one child but not for another. As playing is social by nature, peer groups have a significant effect on the way the playing situation develops.

Very young children play in interaction with adults or older children. At an early age, children also start to actively explore their object environment, which prepares them to a transition to imaginary play. Imaginary games mean detachment from here and now, and the onset of imagination and abstract thinking. Older children in particular are attracted by games with rules.

Children use everything they see, hear and experience as elements in their play. When they play, they imitate and create new things. They pick up things that are meaningful for them from the sphere of both the real world and that of fantasy and fiction, translating them into the language of play. All that is visible in the play is meaningful to the child, but not all that is meaningful to the child is visible in the play.

The educator community's activity

The extent to which play gives satisfaction to the child often depends on educators' activities. Supporting children's play requires careful observation and an ability to analyse play situations. Sensitive, committed educators recognise children's verbal and non-verbal initiatives and intentions and respond to them. Educators allow freedom to children who are engaged in play, but to be successful, children's play also often needs to be guided directly or indirectly. Depending on children's age, playing skills, type of play and other situational factors, educators' role varies from participation to outside observation. Indirect guidance aims to enrich play with ideas or tools, for instance.

Educators understand the significance of the peer group in enabling children's spontaneous play. They show appreciation of the play by listening to the children, that is, they both observe the play and communicate orally with the children. Educators also familiarise themselves with the reality reflected in children's play by following children's popular culture, for instance.

Educators are also able to analyse children's play in terms of learning. They recognise the importance of play to imaginative capabilities, empathy towards other people's situations, social skills, language learning, and physical skills, among others. Educators are aware of and capable of making use of the links between play and other areas of activity, but they also leave room for children's spontaneous, sometimes even rough ideas about play.

The ECEC environment

ECEC typically involves conscious efforts to build up a stimulating play environment and to maintain and renew it. Building a good play environment is based on educators' expertise of play culture and their knowledge of the stages through which children's play develops. Children's current interests are also taken into account. Children themselves participate in the maintenance and renewal of the environment according to their capabilities. Also, improving the play environment offers parents a good opportunity for participation.

Children's age and developmental stage and the necessary arrangements in terms of time, space and equipment are important considerations when planning in- and outdoor spaces. Equipment should be versatile and convertible and adequate in number.

Physical activities

The child's meaningful experiences

Daily physical activity is fundamental to children's well-being and healthy growth. When engaging in physical activities, children think, experience joy, express their feelings, and learn new things. Physical activity also means experiencing, moving swiftly, perspiring and getting breathless. Physically active lifestyles start to develop in early childhood.

For children, physical activity is a natural way of getting to know themselves, other people and the environment. Children's awareness and mastering of their own body provides a basis for sound self-esteem.

The educator community's activity

It is important that the actions and everyday choices of the educator community provide children with an opportunity to have daily physical activity. Educators should create an environment that encourages physical activities among children, remove obstacles to physical activity, and teach related safety skills to children. Children who are less active physically should be encouraged to move.

Regular physical education activities are of core importance to the child's development and motor learning. It is important that educators be able to make use of different styles of teaching and that each child's motor development is observed regularly. Linking motor activity to other activities and teaching increases children's opportunities to learn.

The educator community should together consider the role of physical activity in children's learning, thus providing a basis for high-quality physical and health education and an action culture that favours physical activity.

The ECEC environment

A good ECEC environment reinforces children's innate desire to move, arouses their interest in learning new things and encourages them to develop their skills. It should offer an appropriate level of challenge and motivate physical activities and play. Being the most important place for children's physical activities, the playground should encourage children to move. Children should also be allowed to use the playground equipment in their spontaneous physical activity and play. Natural areas and sports facilities in the neighbourhood should be utilised.

Convertibility is a key consideration in planning and using different spaces, as children need room to move. Even in indoor facilities, children should have an opportunity to move and play vigorously.

Artistic experiences and self-expression

The child's meaningful experiences

Children gain their basic artistic experiences in a developmental environment that fosters a wide range of artistic activities, such as music, drawing, dance, drama, handicrafts and children's literature. The intensity and enchantment of artistic experiences activates children and grips their attention. Artistic activities and experiences introduce the child to an aesthetic world: the joy of learning, artistic drama, forms, sounds, colours, scents, sentiments and combinations of experiences based on the different senses. Art gives the child an opportunity to experience an imaginary world where everything is possible and true in a make-believe way.

Art also involves regularity in terms of the child's learning and practising. Children enjoy artistic activity, skills and self-expression both when working alone and when working together with other children in various productions. Through artistic experiences and activities, children develop as individuals and group members. Basic artistic experiences gained in early childhood form a basis for children's later art preferences and choices, as well as their cultural values.

The educator community's activity

The educator community enables children's artistic experience and expression, showing respect for their own personal choices and observations. Children's own imagination and creativity are given room, time, and peace. The implementation and scheduling of activities are led by creative ideas and the joy of working together. Children should be provided with opportunities for a wide range of activities in different art forms, including painting, drawing, playing an instrument, singing, building, acting, dancing, woodwork, bricolage, sewing, and listening and telling stories and poems.

The educator guides children in tasks that require technical skills and also helps them practise their skills, where the focus is on the invaluable targets set by the children themselves. The educator documents children's artistic activities and organises events for presenting the results of these activities. Among themselves, the educator community should support their varied professional skills, creativity, spontaneity, and courage to improvise. Art provides educators with means to develop as a human being and to help develop humanity in children.

The ECEC environment

The ECEC environment should offer children opportunities for artistic experiences and ensure that they have time and room to freely explore artistic materials, ideas and concepts and practise their skills in various ways. An aesthetic environment as such can be an artistic experience for the child. The ECEC environment contributes to bringing out the child's artistic expression and skills.

Artistic expertise can be extended through co-operation with local cultural authorities or other experts promoting children's culture. When educators themselves enjoy art, they create an inspiring atmosphere in their environment, at the same time providing a positive model for artistic appreciation.

Exploration

The child's meaningful experiences

Children innately have a sense of exploration and wonder. On exploring, they satisfy their curiosity and have a feeling of belonging in the world and community around them. At different ages, children's own inner worlds, interactions with other children and adults, and their immediate environment inspire them to spontaneous exploration. Children feel that their explorations, questions, thinking and activity are meaningful. Individually or together in a group, they can take their time experimenting with new things. Experiences of trial and error, and moments of insight maintain and strengthen the child's joy of learning.

The educator community's activity

Through their own attitudes and activity, educators create an open atmosphere that inspires and encourages exploration. They allow time for exploration and wondering and make it possible for children to gain a wide range of experiences that keep up their interest. When learning and exploring together with children, educators guide and encourage children in various care, education and teaching situations to experiment and to find explanations to phenomena in the world around them. Through their activity, educators enable and encourage children's own thinking, problem solving and imagination.

The ECEC environment

A positive, encouraging ECEC environment supports children's explorative activities. To encourage exploration, the ECEC environment should be versatile, offering a wide variety of inspiring materials and equipment. Nature and the immediate neighbourhood are important elements of the exploration environment. The environment also introduces a range of knowledge- and experience-based elements into the actions shared by children and educators. A rich, flexible ECEC environment enables the use of all senses and the whole body for exploration, experimentation and insights.

3.8 Content orientations⁶

Children learn all the time in different environments and situations. In interactions with the environment and people, children process and analyse information using their existing conceptual frameworks, being active learners. Educational activity inherently requires that educators make value choices. This can be seen, for instance, in the choices made when formulating the ECEC environment.

In ECEC, it is necessary to achieve a developmental balance through a spectrum of different activities, and the educator should be aware of the stage of each child's growth and development. The balance between the different content areas of ECEC can be examined by using certain basic forms of human understanding, knowledge and experience. There are several such basic forms, and they are mutually complementary. This kind of framework is used in order to ensure that the child gets a picture of the world that is many-sided, integrated and comprehensive.

The core content areas of ECEC are built on the following six orientations:

- mathematical orientation
- natural sciences orientation
- historical-societal orientation
- aesthetic orientation
- ethical orientation
- religious-philosophical orientation

The concept of orientation underlines the notion that the intention is not for children to study the content of different subjects but to start to acquire tools and capabilities by means of which they are able to gradually increase their ability to examine, understand and experience a wide range of phenomena in the world around them. Each orientation has its own specific way of critical thinking and of expressing creativity, practising imagination, refining feelings and directing activity.

⁶ Orientations are basically different ways of feeling about or reacting to phenomena and things.

In addition, the actual selection and modification of content in different orientations varies depending on environment and situation. The educator community needs to have didactic knowledge about children of different ages and different developmental stages, and in order to be able to select and modify content in specific cases, they need knowledge about the child group, operating environment and conditions. At best, successful selection of content helps children gain an understanding of the basic ways of shaping and explaining human experience that have developed through historical development processes.

The themes, phenomena and contents of different orientations are linked to children's immediate environment, daily life and concrete experiences so that the children are able to make observations and form their own views. Contents of different orientations are also available in libraries, theatres, exhibitions, etc. Furthermore, modern information technology with its various areas of application offers an abundance of contents. Children's own interests and needs, and local circumstances, should be decisive factors in selecting contents in specific cases.

In ECEC, the child does not study or assimilate the content of different orientations or different subjects, and there are no performance requirements. The orientations provide educators with a framework that tells them what kind of experiences, situations and environments they should look for, give shape to and offer in order to ensure children's balanced growth and development.

Language is a means of communication and interaction in the context of all orientations. Therefore it is of vital importance in all care, education and teaching situations that educators use language that is as careful and accurate as possible, and also that they explain new concepts to children.

Mathematical orientation

Mathematical orientation is based on making comparisons, conclusions and calculations in a closed conceptual system. In ECEC, this takes place in a playful manner in daily situations by using concrete materials, objects and equipment that children know and that they find interesting.

Natural sciences orientation

The phenomena of the natural world are examined by observing, studying and experimenting. In the same way as above, the content areas of this orientation with their various phenomena, such as animals and plants found during different seasons, can be located in children's immediate environment indoors and outdoors. A typical feature of the natural sciences orientation is the use of experimentation. Causal relationships become familiar in controlled conditions, which helps children gradually gain insights into natural phenomena and the factors influencing them.

Historical-societal orientation

In the historical orientation, objects and documents from the past are used to build a picture of the past together with children. Insights into past events can also be gained through older people, children's parents and children themselves. In this way, a time dimension and new meanings are introduced to the places and sights of the immediate environment and local district. At the same time, it is possible to develop an understanding of the operation of modern society.

Aesthetic orientation

The aesthetic orientation is broad and multifaceted. It is extended by observing, listening, feeling and creating, but also through imagination and intuition. The objects of this orientation give children personal sentiments, feelings and experiences of beauty, harmony, melody, rhythm, style, excitement and joy, as well as their antitheses. The child's values, attitudes and views start to develop. As for both development as a human being and developing humanity, identification is one of the important processes of this orientation.

Ethical orientation

In the ethical orientation, the focus is on issues related to values and norms. Children's daily life contains situations and events that can be considered and analysed from the viewpoint of the questions of right and wrong, good and bad, truth and lie. The questions of justice, equality, respect and freedom can also be dealt with naturally in the context of daily events. It is essential to take account of the child's developmental stage. Fears, anxiety and guilt are part of children's life, too. These issues are discussed with children in such a way that they can feel safe.

Religious-philosophical orientation

The core of the religious-philosophical orientation is formed by religious, spiritual and philosophical issues and phenomena. Interest is taken in the traditions, customs and practices of the child's own religion or beliefs. The child is offered an opportunity to experience silence and wonder, to ask questions and ponder over issues. The child's sensitivity and ability to understand the non-verbal and symbolic are respected, supported and strengthened. Insights are gained into the customs of various religions and beliefs close to the child. The content of the religious-philosophical orientation is agreed on with each child's parents in drawing up the individual ECEC plan.

Continuity between the ECEC content orientations and the subject fields of the Core Curriculum for Pre-School Education in Finland

Through the ECEC content orientations, a broad spectrum of human understanding, knowledge and experience and related processes are gradually introduced to the child. The orientations are larger in scope than school subjects. The pre-school education core

curriculum does not either contain any subjects but core subject fields. When these core subject fields are juxtaposed with the ECEC content orientations, the continuity between them becomes obvious.

The mathematical orientation is clearly linked to the core subject field of mathematics. The natural sciences orientation, in turn, has links with the subject fields of environmental and natural sciences, but also with those of physical and motor development, and health. The historical orientation is linked with the subject fields of language and interaction, ethics and philosophy, environmental and natural studies, health, and art and culture. The aesthetic orientation is connected to the subject fields of language and interaction, ethics and philosophy, and art and culture. The aesthetic orientation and the religious-philosophical orientation, in turn, are clearly connected with the subject field of ethics and philosophy, although they can also be seen to be linked with the subject fields of language and interaction, and art and culture.

4 PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN ECEC

4.1 ECEC partnership

In ECEC, ECEC partnership means a conscious commitment by parents and staff to collaboration for supporting children's growth, development and learning. This requires mutual trust and respect, and equality. Parents have the primary right to and responsibility for their child's education, and also know their child well. Staff, in turn, drawing on their professional knowledge and competence, are responsible for creating conditions favourable for ECEC partnership and co-operation on equal terms.

ECEC partnership is built on the child's needs, the realisation of the child's best interests and rights being the guiding principle in all ECEC activities. ECEC partnership combines the knowledge and experiences of parents and ECEC staff, both of which are important influences in the child's life. The child's well-being is best fostered when parents and educators combine their knowledge of the child. Values, views and responsibilities in terms of the partnership are discussed both within the educator community and with parents.

ECEC partnership is concerned not only with the attitudes of parents and staff members towards their common education task but also with the related practical organisation and arrangements in ways that meet the wishes of both parties. Staff have the primary responsibility for employing the partnership approach from the very beginning in the child's early education and care, taking into consideration each family's specific needs. Parents are provided with opportunities for discussing their child's education, and also for discussions with other parents and the whole staff. The partnership approach also aims to enhance co-operation between parents.

Another aim of the ECEC partnership approach is to enable early accurate identification of the child's potential need for support in some areas of growth, development or learning, and to collaborate with the parents to create a common strategy for supporting the child. The partnership approach should also be pursued in problem situations in interactions between the child's parents and staff members.

4.2 Parental engagement in planning and evaluating unit operation

Staff are responsible for drafting a unit-specific ECEC curriculum. However, parents should together be provided with an opportunity to influence its content and participate in its evaluation.

In order for parents and children to be able to participate in evaluation, the ECEC curriculum should be drawn up jointly by the whole educational community, in addition to which it should be used actively, and all staff members and parents should be aware of its content and underlying principles. Evaluation by parents and children forms part of the ongoing development of ECEC. Parents monitor and evaluate the attainment of the goals set in the ECEC curriculum, and staff evaluate and develop the curriculum at regular intervals and whenever necessary.

4.3 An individual ECEC plan and its evaluation

An individual ECEC plan is drawn up for each child in daycare in collaboration with the parents, and the implementation of the plan is assessed regularly.⁷

The early education and care of an individual child is based on the individual ECEC plan drawn up jointly by the staff and the child's parents at the start of the care relationship. The plan aims to take account of the child's individuality and the parent's views in arranging the child's care. It enables the staff to act consistently and be aware of the child's individual needs. The staff should systematically and consciously observe the child's development and take account of their observations in planning activities and in the child's individual ECEC plan.

The individual ECEC plan takes into consideration the child's experiences, current needs and future perspectives, interests and strengths, and individual needs for support and guidance. In discussions with the parents, attention should be drawn to positive aspects that foster the child's development. Concerns and problems related to the child's well-being are brought up in as concrete terms as possible and solutions are sought together with the parents.

Ways of co-operation are agreed on in the individual ECEC plan jointly with the parents. Even the child may participate in drafting and assessing the plan in such ways as agreed between parents and staff. The implementation of the individual ECEC plan is monitored and assessed regularly both among the staff and with the parents.

⁷ The Act on the Status and Rights of Social Welfare Clients 812/2000

The staff should ensure that the individual ECEC plan and the individual pre-school education plan form a functioning whole.

5 SPECIAL SUPPORT IN ECEC

The child's need for support⁸ and needs assessment

In ECEC, the child's need for support is assessed by considering both the parents' and the staff's observations, or based on the child's earlier established need for special support. The child may need support in the physical, cognitive, emotional or social areas of development or in the development of skills for varying periods of time. The need for support may also arise in situations when the child's health or development is endangered or is not adequately fostered by developmental conditions.

On assessing the child's need for support, it is important to identify and define the child's individual opportunities to act in different environments and in different educational situations and to also define related need for support and guidance. For planning support measures, it is also important to create an overall picture of the child, his strengths, interests and inspirations.

If necessary, an appropriate expert opinion that helps to provide support to the child is obtained to facilitate the assessment. However, measures to support the child through ECEC activities are initiated immediately after becoming aware of the need for support. Further, if need be, ECEC or other experts are consulted, in ways agreed with the parents. The aim is to prevent the child's need for support from accumulating and becoming prolonged.

Principles for providing support and ECEC support measures

As far as possible, support is provided in the context of general ECEC services so that the child acts as a member of a group with other children, and his social interactions within the group are supported. The support needed by the child is started as early as possible. The provision of support includes intensified co-operation between the parents and ECEC staff.

As part of ECEC support measures, the child's physical, psychic and cognitive environment is adjusted to the child's needs. Daily educational activities are adjusted by differentiating, practising basic skills, and strengthening the child's self-esteem. In addition, the rehabilitative

⁸ The Act on Child Day Care uses the concept of 'children in need of special care and education'. This paper is based on a comprehensive view of the child's need for support and ways of addressing them by supporting the child's early education and care.

elements of daily ECEC activities are reinforced systematically, including: structure⁹, interaction, guidance of the child's spontaneous activity¹⁰, and group-based activities.

Individualising ECEC

The individual ECEC plan includes an assessment of the child's need for support, and arrangements for providing support.¹¹ The plan describes how the child's individualised guidance and ECEC activities are combined and what changes are to be made in educational activities and the physical environment. On assessing the need for changes, the educator community analyses its own activities and its possibilities for guiding the child.

The education, rehabilitation and pre-school education plans drawn up for the child in different contexts should form an integrated whole. When daycare, pre-school education or school begins or daycare places change or there are other transitions in the child's life, the continuity of support should be ensured.

Implementation of support services in ECEC

Depending on the child's needs, ECEC may also include other support services, such as rehabilitation guidance, therapy and/or special education for children subject to compulsory education.¹² These services are provided as an integrated whole, including both educational and medical rehabilitation, and attention is paid to the co-ordination of the services. This calls for co-operation between different authorities, an adequate provision of competent staff, and the facilities, means and materials that meet the child's needs.

⁹ The structure of the daycare environment consists of a clear structural design of time, space and people, enabling the child to anticipate and learn the course of events. Structure assessment requires an analysis of the child's daily activities, modes of action and social contacts. The maintenance of the structure forms part of the methodology of special pedagogical guidance.

¹⁰ Guiding the child's spontaneous activity improves the child's ability to assess and develop its own activities and behaviour in relation to others, or helps identify ways of working that support sustained attention.

¹¹ This part of the individual ECEC plan corresponds to the rehabilitation plan for a child in need of special care and education, referred to in the Act on Basic Education.

¹² Section 25 of the Act on Basic Education (628/1998); Section 13 of the Core Curriculum for Pre-School Education in Finland 2000

6 CERTAIN CONSIDERATIONS IN IMPLEMENTING ECEC

6.1 Networking

Co-operation takes place, in accordance with the National Policy Definition on Early Childhood Education and Care, with the whole large network providing services for children and families. If need be, there is also co-operation at a regional level. Key partners include educational, social and health authorities, agencies in the areas of culture and sports, private service providers, parishes, and organisations. Practices and principles should be specified for co-operation. Local and unit-specific ECEC curricula specify ways for network-based co-operation, its goals and realisation.

Co-operation with educational authorities primarily consists of the creation and development of co-operation forms and structures that ensure continuity in the child's education and learning. In collaboration with child health clinics, a system is created and developed that enables the child's growth and development to be monitored jointly with the parents, and advice to be given to the family on different services, if needed.

One of the central goals of network-based co-operation is to ensure early intervention in risk situations. For dealing with an individual child's affairs and for cases requiring child welfare intervention, practices and principles established in the child's best interest should exist for co-operation with child welfare, family work, family counselling, home-help and other social welfare service units.

6.2 ECEC and children with different language and culture backgrounds

Children with different language and culture backgrounds here refers to Sámi and Roma children, children using sign language, and children with an immigrant background. Children belonging to cultural minorities should be provided with opportunities to grow up in a multicultural society as members of both their own cultural communities and Finnish society. Early education and care for these children is provided within mainstream ECEC services, each child belonging to a group of children and receiving support for social interactions.

Publicly operated ECEC services in Finland are based on general ECEC goals, paying attention to the child's cultural background and mother tongue. Although gender relations vary in different cultures, Finnish ECEC is based on equality between girls and boys. Implementing ECEC activities requires that staff should have a good cultural understanding to be able to discuss with parents the varying needs of children coming from different families and for parents' educational goals to be taken into account on equal terms in the spirit of reciprocity.

The primary responsibility for retaining and developing the child's own language and culture rests with the family. In ECEC, children are encouraged to use their own language. As far as possible, the development of the children's mother tongue is also supported in ECEC activities by making use of the knowledge and competence of their and their parents' own language environment.

Through participation in ECEC, children with different language and culture backgrounds have possibilities to learn Finnish or Swedish as their second language in natural situations with other children and educators. In addition, children need guidance in adopting and using the language. The ways in which the child's language and culture are to be supported are specified in the individual ECEC plan drawn up jointly with the parents.

In ECEC, the child's own culture, customs and history are studied and appreciated, and they form a visible part of the daily activities. In co-operation with parents and different cultural communities, efforts are made to maintain children's cultural traditions and to support their possibilities to express their own cultural background in ECEC.

In addition, the special needs and priorities of different cultural groups are taken into consideration in ECEC activities as follows:

Sámi children

Three different Sámi languages are spoken in Finland: North Sámi, Inari Sámi, and Skolt Sámi. Efforts are made to support the Sámi language and to make the Sámi culture known within ECEC activities in co-operation with children's parents and other representatives of the Sámi culture. ECEC activities for a Sámi-speaking child principally take place in groups formed by Sámi-speaking children.

Roma children

Representatives of the Roma culture are worked with to create co-operation networks, and the knowledge of the Roma culture among staff is improved. Participation in ECEC activities among Roma children is increased in co-operation with their parents. Roma children should be supported in their Finnish or Swedish language skills.

Children using sign language

Sign language can be the child's mother tongue, first language or second language. ECEC for children using sign language primarily takes place in a sign-language group or a mixed group consisting of children using sign language and children using both sign communication and spoken language. One aim is to familiarise the child with the use of an interpreter in different ECEC situations.

Children with an immigrant background

In ECEC activities for children with an immigrant background, it is of prime importance to inform the parents of the goals and principles of Finnish ECEC, and to discuss these with them. Parents are encouraged to maintain their child's own language, and given advice on ways of supporting the development of the child's mother tongue at home, thus creating a basis for a working bilingualism. ECEC promotes children's integration into Finnish society.

6.3 Language immersion, ECEC in a foreign language, and ECEC activities based on an alternative pedagogy

The National Policy Definitions and National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care also apply to immersion programmes, and activities arranged in a language other than Finnish or Swedish or using an alternative pedagogy. In these cases, it is important that the child's parents are adequately informed of the underlying philosophy and any special ECEC goals.

Language immersion

Language immersion can be arranged in the second domestic language (Swedish or Finnish) or in a minority language mainly for children whose mother tongue is a local majority language. In this way, the opportunities offered by a bilingual environment can be utilised for supporting the child's linguistic development in the second domestic language or a minority language. In order that the learning of a new language would not have any negative effects on the development of mother tongue skills, monolingual children should not participate in total language immersion until starting from the age of three when their mother tongue skills are good enough. When language immersion is used, it should be ensured in co-operation with the parents that the child's mother tongue skills development is appropriate to his age. The municipality should ensure that there is continuity between language immersion started in ECEC and primary education.

ECEC in a foreign language

ECEC in a foreign language refers to the activities taking place in a language other than Finnish or Swedish. When the child participates in such activities, the responsibility for the development of the child's mother tongue rests with the parents.

ECEC using an alternative pedagogy or education philosophy

ECEC can be based on different pedagogical approaches or education philosophies, such as Steiner, Montessori, Freinet and Reggio Emilia pedagogies.

6.4 A child in hospital

Where applicable, the National Policy Definitions and National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care are applied to ECEC organised in hospitals and other institutions. During the child's hospitalisation, the continuity of early education according to the child's needs is ensured through co-operation between different ECEC services. Special attention should be paid to maintaining and establishing warm personal relationships, and continuing interactions between the child and the adults and other children. Co-operation with parents is of vital importance.

7 A LOCAL ECEC CURRICULUM

7.1 Drawing up a local ECEC curriculum

The National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care provide a basis for local ECEC curricula drawn up in municipalities. In addition, local ECEC curricula take account of any local plans concerning children and families, local ECEC policy definitions, and local pre-school education curricula. Local ECEC policy definitions or plans define what kind of plans the municipality should make at regional, district and unit levels, and the ways in which they are confirmed and revised regularly. The local pre-school education and ECEC curricula form an integrated whole, and there is a clear continuity between them. The local ECEC curriculum specifies and records the special features, goals and modes of operation of different service forms.

Local ECEC curricula provide a tool for guiding municipally operated ECEC, and also a key tool for staff. The National Policy Definitions and Curriculum Guidelines should be discussed broadly in the municipality. The entire staff should commit themselves to drafting, implementing, monitoring and evaluating them.

A unit-specific ECEC curriculum complements the local one, describing the special features and priorities of each operational environment and unit. It also includes the specified targets of different service forms. Each curriculum is complemented and specified gradually, as situational variation in the operational targets needs to be taken into account, the selection of content depending on children, groups, and operational environment and conditions in each specific case. Activities are documented and assessed at regular intervals. The unit-specific ECEC curriculum is one of the core elements of the creation of a good educational community between parents and staff.

7.2 The content of the local ECEC curriculum

On drafting its ECEC curriculum, the municipality takes account of its existing practices and other plans. The following is an indicative list of issues that can be included in the curriculum:

- A description of local ECEC guidelines and strategies

Key guidelines and strategies concerning the planning of ECEC content:

- ways of providing ECEC services, modes of operation and their

special features

- organising support services
 - an ECEC quality assurance system
 - co-operation partners and principles
 - a safety plan
 - specific local or regional ECEC programmes and projects
- The mission and values of ECEC
 - Goals and targets
 - Putting the local ECEC curriculum into practice and giving it a more concrete form in unit-specific ECEC curricula
 - Implementation of ECEC
 - Providing special support for a child
 - Organising ECEC for children with different language and culture backgrounds
 - Ensuring continuity and co-operation between ECEC, pre-school education and basic education
 - Co-operation
 - implementing ECEC partnership
 - multi-professional and network-based co-operation; municipal agencies, the third sector and parishes
 - Principles for the drafting and follow-up of individual ECEC plans

- Evaluation, development and monitoring of ECEC content
 - local ECEC development priorities

7.3 A local ECEC curriculum as part of quality improvement efforts

The National Policy Definitions and Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care, as well as any local policy definitions and plans, provide a basis for evaluating and developing ECEC in municipalities.

The National Curriculum Guidelines provide an outline of good ECEC that should be aimed at. Local ECEC curricula form an integral part of quality management at municipality and unit levels, where the aim is to evaluate and develop activities in many different ways on a regular basis. In addition to ECEC and administrative staff, parents, children and different co-operation partners can participate in evaluation.

Evaluation is a precondition of development. It helps determine to what extent goals have been attained and identifies operational strengths and development needs. The quality assessment process itself is subject to evaluation. Regular documentation as a part of quality management enables long-range monitoring and evaluation.